

San Francisco Libre News



Reading's Twin Town in Nicaragua



www.reading-sfl.org.uk

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RSFLA's 10th Anniversary Celebrations

On Saturday 11th September, the RSFLA, in conjunction with Reading Borough Council, held a series of events to celebrate ten years of Reading's twinning link with San Francisco Libre. The events at the Rivermead Centre were an opportunity for both RSFLA's supporters, and the general public, to learn more about Reading's link with Nicaragua.



Reading's Mayor addresses the participants of the Workshop

The first event of the day was a workshop opened by Reading's Mayor, Councillor Richard Stainthorp. The workshop featured talks by Sue Errington and Leader of the Council, Councillor David Sutton, who were both instrumental in the development of a solidarity group, founded during the Contra War of the 1980s, which evolved into today's twin town link. Alina Briceño from SFL then participated in discussions on the future direction of the RSFLA.

After the workshop, tables were laid and more people arrived for an early evening Nicaraguan Dinner—a wonderful meal prepared by the Rivermead Centre's catering staff.

To round off the events, Larry and a team from the Rising Sun Arts Centre entertained and involved participants in a Salsa dancing lesson—followed by dancing to the end of the evening.

Mayor pulled from mud by oxen

Reading Mayor, Councillor Richard Stainthorp and his family—recently returned from a ten day trip to Nicaragua—have been describing their adventures.

Richard and Sue Stainthorp and their three children (Clare, 17, Mike, 14 and Josh, 12) spent six days in San Francisco Libre at the end of October, learning about the issues affecting the town, and about its plans for development. The Stainthorps visited projects funded by the RSFLA, to see what assistance the people of Reading are providing our twin town there.

The Mayoral family then toured Nicaragua for three days, and it was during these travels that their four wheel drive pickup became bogged down in mud while climbing a hill. Frantic attempts to free the vehicle proved fruitless, and the family was contemplating its options when a farmer from a nearby village appeared with a pair of yoked oxen. With a chain attached to the yoke, the oxen experienced little trouble in dragging the car out of the mud.

The Stainthorps also visited a recent ecotourism development on the Pacific coast, where they witnessed sea turtles climbing the beach to lay their eggs—and were even lucky enough to see many eggs hatching.

The Mayor plans to share more of his experiences at a public meeting at RISC, 35-39 London Street (see below)

Upcoming Events

21 January (Friday, 8pm)

**Talk by Mayor Stainthorp
at RISC, 35-39 London St**

6 March Reading Half Marathon

5 June (provisional) RSFLA Cycle Ride

Alina Briceño visits Reading

RSFLA invited a representative from San Francisco Libre to participate in the RSFLA's 10th Anniversary events in September. Alina Briceño (our liaison contact) was nominated.

During Alina's seven days in Reading, she was invited to tea in the Mayor's Parlour and was given a tour of the Forbury Gardens Restoration Project.

Alina also met with Kevin Boyle and Greg Bello of St James and St William of York churches, whose congregations provided vital support to Jeyserd, when he stayed in Reading to study Carpentry at Reading College.



Alina (L) and Bente survey RISC's roof garden

Alina enjoyed a tour of the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) and its famous rooftop garden. A trip to Reading University's Language and Literacy Centre was arranged. She also visited Highdown School, a mother-and-child centre, a farm, a stately home, Windsor Castle and London.

She had a great time (despite missing her baby) and the many RSFLA members who provided hospitality and visits all gained from the ideas, personality and experiences of Alina.

RSFLA Website

Further information and updates on the articles included in this Newsletter are available on the Association's web site at: <http://www.reading-sfl.org.uk/>

Contact us: <http://www.reading-sfl.org.uk> editor@reading-sfl.org.uk

Editor of this Edition: Eoghan Clarkson, 91 Howth Drive, Woodley, Reading RG5 3DJ, Tel: 0118 954 0296

Treasurer RSFL Trust/Peter Oakley Trust: Nicola Tipler, 40 Morgan Road, Reading RG1 5HG. Tel: 0118 975 1488; nicola@shute15.fsnet.co.uk

WOMAD 2004

Last July, for the third year running, the RSFLA arranged some Nicaraguan games at the WOMAD festival.

As in previous years, a popular game was the Piñata, and many children volunteered to be blindfolded and to use a big stick to try to smash open the sweets-filled papier-mâché model.



A sweets-filled piñata is destroyed

In a game designed to highlight the environmental and other difficulties faced by Nicaraguans, two teams raced to transport water, in a bowl balanced on their heads, whilst being harassed by 'Hurricane', 'Heat wave', 'Drought' and 'Poor Access'.



A water carrier experiences a Hurricane

Bicycles also featured. In a reference to the RSFLA's Bicycle Project, participants attempted a slow bike race across the front of the small stage. The important part that working animals play in the life of Nicaraguans was described as children played 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey'.

The final game contrasted the types of food available here, with the types that you would find in San Francisco Libre. Two teams competed to select only foodstuffs which they might find in SFL, out of a basket of common groceries.

The session ended with a dance lead by Pilar and Vicky.

Project Roundup

Last July, Eoghan Clarkson visited San Francisco Libre for a two weeks to see how the projects funded through the RSFLA are progressing.

Peter Oakley Trust

Eoghan met most of the sixteen students who are being sponsored by the people of Reading—and heard how much of a difference it has made to the families of those students lucky enough to have been selected for the scheme.

Carpentry Workshop

Eoghan discovered that the Carpentry Workshop is doing well, with Jeyserd and his two assistants working on a bed that they had been hired to build. Jeyserd recorded a video tour of the workshop, and Eoghan was invited to the inaugural meeting of a committee designed to oversee the running of the workshop.

Bicycle Project

José Ángel (the then Mayor of SFL, who stepped down at the November elections which saw his Deputy Mayor replace him) explained how successful the project to supply students with bicycles had been. A number of families had managed to buy their bicycles, providing funds with which more bikes could be bought. Eoghan handed over an extra \$500 that the RSFLA had decided to donate to the project.

Cyclo-Taxi Project

Eoghan was told that the people of SFL had decided to move two of the four Cyclo-Taxis supplied by Reading to another village in the municipality, in order to spread the benefit that this new form of transport provides.



A Cyclo-Taxi on the streets of SFL

Schools Resource

On his July trip to SFL, Eoghan Clarkson delivered a video filmed by students of Ascot's Licensed Victuallers' school. SFL students then wrote letters, and recorded video messages which have since been passed on to their pen pals in Ascot.

The RSFLA and RISC's education department are hoping to develop a web resource oriented to the National Curriculum needs of teachers and students—enabling more of Reading's schools to become involved with our link to San Francisco Libre.

News from Nicaragua

The following was reported by the USA-based solidarity organisation NicaNet, which publishes a weekly news digest at: <http://www.nicanet.org/>

FSLN gains in municipal elections

The Sandinista Front (FSLN), the largest party in the Democratic Convergence, gained in almost all Nicaragua's principal cities and municipalities during the municipal elections of 7th Nov 2004. The FSLN increased its control of municipalities from 55 to 88, more than half Nicaragua's 152 municipalities.

The results were a blow to the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) and its imprisoned leader, Arnoldo Aleman. The PLC's overall tally of municipalities controlled was reduced by almost half, to about 43. The FSLN even took El Crucero, the town set in the hills above Managua where Aleman has his primary residence.

US still opposed to Sandinistas

Dan Fisk, a US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, arrived in Nicaragua on November 14 on a "private official visit". Over the following week he met with various leaders of the main rightwing parties. Apparently the US State Department wants Nicaraguan "democratic forces" to reunite to avoid further Sandinista victories. The national elections will take place in November 2005.